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Memories of the Unlived Body: Jean-Louis Schefer, Georges Bataille and Gilles Deleuze

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Abstract:

Jean-Louis Schefer's newly translated *The Ordinary Man of Cinema* (2016), originally published in 1980, proposes a singular account of the experience of cinema which departs from the principal tendencies of film theory. It has nevertheless had a profound if somewhat invisible influence in film philosophy and theory since its publication, notably in the work of Gilles Deleuze. This essay proposes a synthetic discussion of Schefer's work on film up to *The Ordinary Man*, arguing that Schefer's work, which draws on his earlier work on painting, construes film as radically non-representational, and as bringing into being, in the spectator, a virtual affectivity corresponding to the distorted and disproportionate bodies and aberrant movements that it presents. I argue that in its recurrent emphasis on the "inchoate" elements in film, and on the "inceptions" of movements that it provokes, Schefer's thought draws implicitly on the Bataillean notion of the *informe* (formlessness). This return to an impossibility of thought at the heart of thought is among the fundamental insights which Deleuze draws from Schefer in *Cinema 2: The Time-image*.

Keywords: Jean-Louis Schefer, Gilles Deleuze, Georges Bataille, affect, body.

Jean-Louis Schefer's book *L'Homme ordinaire du cinéma*, published in English translation as *The Ordinary Man of Cinema* by Semiotexte in 2016, has been a persistent yet paradoxically invisible reference in film theory

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and philosophy since its appearance in 1980. It was a significant reference for Gilles Deleuze in his two volumes on cinema of 1985; Deleuze proposed, in the lectures that prepared for the books (1985), that it was one of only two works that seriously confronted the question of the relation between the cinema and thought, the other being Serge Daney's *La Rampe: Cahier critique 1970–1982* (1983). Nonetheless, perhaps because of the twenty-six-year deferral of its full translation, perhaps because of the difficulty and eccentricity of Schefer's writing, *The Ordinary Man of Cinema* has not had the recognition it deserves (the notable exceptions include Andrew, 1984 [pp. 189–90]; Conley, 1985 and 2010; Mandocki, 1998; Frampton, 2006, [pp. 68–70], French, 2012 and Vaughan, 2012 and 2015).¹ The difficulty may derive from the fact that Schefer does not so much propose a theory as a practice of writing in relation to the experience of the cinema. *The Ordinary Man of Cinema*, and Schefer's other propositions concerning cinema, do not cohere into a synthetic system, nor does he propose a defined terminology. Certain words do recur in Schefer's writing – sideration, experiment, inclination, disproportion, anamorphosis, parenthesis, inception, species, thing – but they recur as elements within a mobile practice of writing rather than as elements of a theoretical lexicon. This is not an individualistic quirk. The “eccentricity” of Schefer's writing is less a matter of individual style than a symptom of the decentred and decentering status he accords to the moving image, which translates itself into his characteristically baroque, twisted syntax. Schefer's stance is intentionally atheoretical; we might at first be tempted to describe it as phenomenological, were it not for the postulation in Schefer's work of the “bankruptcy of the logic of perception as a productive mode of analysis”, as Tom Conley puts it (1985, p. 6). The approach is perhaps better described as existential, a writing of the experience of film, but also as infantile. Childhood is a prominent thematic in Schefer's work, not only due to the prominence of an autobiographical strand in which Schefer brings into play his own childhood experience and memories of film, but also because for Schefer cinema solicits and conjures a kind of infantile pre-history of the subject, a realm of unrealized affects.

The challenge of Schefer's writing is also present in the fact that he breaks firmly with more recognizable film theories such as the realism of

1. I focus in this article on *The Ordinary Man of Cinema* and the writings on film which precede it. Vaughan (2012) attends more fully to the later works *Du monde et du mouvement des images* and *Cinématographies*. All translations are mine except where otherwise indicated.

André Bazin, the apparatus theory around Jean-Louis Baudry, Christian Metz's "syntagmatic" and subsequent psychoanalytic work, Lacanian accounts of suture and of the gaze, cognitive approaches, or theories of embodied spectatorship. In textual terms, Schefer's writing on film is singularly bereft of the panoply of proper names through which theory is usually advanced, nor does it work through the analysis of sequences or of the narrative structures of complete films, often focusing, and obsessively so, on isolated details: faces, gags, accidents, blurs, grains, tones. Schefer's film writing is in these respects markedly different from Deleuze's approach in the two cinema volumes, which proceeds in part through extensive commentaries on Bergson and Peirce, among others. Schefer brings no defined body of knowledge to the writing other than that of his experience as an "ordinary" spectator of film; knowledge is accumulated, but also expended, in the practice of writing, as if any conceptual positions attained were recurrently altered or effaced in the turning movement of the text itself, in its syntactic intervals and connections. Nicole Brenez suggests a reading experience akin to this when she writes of Schefer's work that:

To describe what he was talking about, Schefer invented a new syntax which works in such a way that, just when you believe you are able to reasonably get hold of a firm thesis, suddenly the idea slips away by means of a false grammatical relation and the movement throws you back at the text like a spinning top. This stylization of the ungraspable draws you along as part of the very proof of that which the theoretical elaboration is constructing: the description of the unknown relations that the cinema installs between the subject and its experience (of the world, of others, of the image). (Brenez, 1997)

This "new syntax" corresponds, as Brenez suggests, to an approach which confronts the very "newness" of the experience of cinema and the kind of anamorphic distortion of relations that it introduces into the world. Schefer approaches cinema as the invention of a new experience of time, a "new humanity", or an "experimental man", and these propositions require a challenging work of interpretation on the part of his reader. I propose in this article to support this through an elucidation of Schefer's film writing in and leading up to *The Ordinary Man of Cinema*, and through discussion of the contexts surrounding and informing it.

Ordinary/Ordure

Ordinary Man is far from ordinary, then, as an experience of reading. Schefer's title nevertheless tempts us to associate his perspective on the cinema with philosophical tendencies to grasp the ordinary as opposed to

the speculative or metaphysical. Hunter Vaughan (2012) has proposed that Schefer's work "offers a badly needed link between cognitive film analysis and metaphysical film-philosophy" (p. 147) and that it is situated in "an intellectual history best demonstrated through Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception and Wittgenstein's later philosophy of language, which focus on walking step-by-step through the ordinary experiences, respectively, of perception and speech" (2012, p. 148). Whilst I agree with Vaughan's parallel proposition that Schefer's approach challenges: "the cognitive imperative that situates the viewer's experience as being fundamentally based upon narrative engagement" (p. 148) and that it also "challenges theories of spectatorship from Plato to Jean-Louis Baudry to Noël Carroll" (2012, p. 154), the reference to Merleau-Ponty and to Wittgenstein and the gesture towards cognitive approaches does not seem to quite capture the aberrant quality not only of the cinematographic movements Schefer considers, but also of the strategies he brings to bear upon them. "*Ordinaire*", in Schefer's title, seems thus to be oriented differently from the philosophies of the ordinary or of ordinary language of which perhaps the most salient representative in terms of film philosophy is Stanley Cavell. There are resonances across the work of Cavell and Schefer particularly insofar as both seem to work on the basis of a memory of viewing films, rather than through sequence analysis and repeated viewing, insofar as qualities of affect and emotion take priority over identification and narrative, and insofar as, like Deleuze, both seek to account for the specific condition that film and film viewing introduces into the world. But Schefer is not interested, as Cavell is, in understanding what it means philosophically to view a film, or in the relation the film bears to reality (for Cavell, following Bazin and Panofsky, the film is reality, minus our participation in it, since it presents it to us as screened [1979, pp. 101–2]). While it does signify the absence of an *a priori* epistemological structure or set of assumptions brought to the screen, "ordinary", for Schefer, does not relate to a normative condition or set of rules so much as to the extraordinary distortions the cinema provokes in the humanity "in" the cinema. "Ordinary", in Schefer's title thus appears as something like a provocation, an inverted reprise and a riposte perhaps to Edgar Morin's 1956 work *The Cinema or the Imaginary Man* (*Le Cinéma ou l'homme imaginaire: Essai d'anthropologie*). In his subtle response to Schefer's book in *Diacritics* in 1985 Conley suggests something of this provocation when he writes:

Even the title, *L'Homme ordinaire du cinéma*, suggests a similar regress to the bizarrely organic look of the adjective *ordinaire*. Since the book has nothing ordinary about it in viewing cinema, it can only bear a redolently olfactive,

richly musky recall in *orde*, where the order of memory harks back to the Old French *ord*, or a farcical, Rabelaisian hieroglyph, *hors de propos*, that cannot be traced unilaterally to the Latin *ordo* or rectilinear, perspectival sense of meaning. (Conley, 1985, p. 8)²

For Conley, *ordinaire* thus perversely signals the tendency in Schefer's approach to the image to turn "all nameable objects into virtually fecal substance knowing no name" (1985, p. 8), drawing on the Latin and Old French etymology of *ordinaire* which links it to filth, *ordure*. To this extent it moves in a different direction from the cognitive approaches to film viewing with which Vaughan suggests we associate it. "Ordinary" is closer perhaps to a word Conley uses – "basal", ordinary in the sense of fundamental, relating to the "humus" (a recurrent Scheferian term) of our bodies, perception and subjectivity. This inflection draws Schefer closer, I will argue, to the "base materialism" associated with the work of Georges Bataille and his contributions to the review *Documents* in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and to Bataille's proposition of the *informe*, the "formless", a tendency to dissipation, an entropic compulsion towards formlessness inherent in things and in meanings; "affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only formless amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit" (1985, p. 31).

Writing Painting

Fittingly, then, in the light of this tendency towards formlessness, *L'Homme ordinaire* appeared in September 1980 in the "grey series" of *Cahiers du cinéma*/Gallimard, commissioned by Jean Narboni (see Narboni, 2015, pp. 37–53). It was an early addition to the series after a collection of writings by Oshima and, more famously, Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida (La Chambre claire)* (1980). The proximity with Barthes' last book extends beyond the visual similitude of the two works; both Barthes' and Schefer's previous work had emerged out of semiology (see Rifkin 2005). Schefer's difficult first book, *Scénographie d'un tableau*, was published in the Editions du Seuil "*Collection Tel Quel*" directed by

2. See also Gilles Deleuze, in one of the lectures for his course on cinema at the University of Vincennes: "There we are, it's not an ordinary movement. I like it. We should keep this 'not ordinary'. I don't mean extraordinary. It's a not ordinary movement for an ordinary man, thus the title 'the ordinary man of cinema'. It's a not ordinary movement for the ordinary man, that is the ordinary man of cinema. But the ordinary man of cinema is not the ordinary man, it's amusing..." (1985).

Philippe Sollers, following Barthes' recommendation.³ The link to Barthes, and also to Julia Kristeva, who Schefer cites in the book, is instructive, since Schefer's "scenography" of an "exemplary" painting by Paris Bordone, *The Chess Players* (1540), was moving in the same direction as Barthes and Kristeva at this time, away from structuralism and from orthodox semiology insofar as these sought a model or structure "behind" the text which it would express or articulate. For Schefer, as for Barthes in *S/Z* (1974), his experimental reading of Balzac's novella "Sarrasine", and as for Kristeva in the dense theoretical essays of the mid- to late 1960s, the "system" of a text is generated by the text itself in the readings and writings that are "operated" upon it or in relation to it. In a brief note on Schefer's book, Barthes (1985) suggests that Schefer proposes a new topology of the relation between a painting and the systems brought to bear on it, whereby the painting appears as nothing other than the relation between itself and these systems. Schefer thus proposes a radical mode of engagement with the visual object in which it exists only "in the account given of it" or "in the total and the organization of the various readings that can be made of it" (Barthes, 1985, p. 150). Schefer's methodology is thus one of writing, a practice or an act of writing, as Barthes puts it "in the act of language"; "the very practice of the picture is its own theory" (1985, p. 151). Something of this practice or work (*travail*) of a plural, multiple reading "in" or through writing is evident in Barthes' *S/Z*; although there is in Barthes' work a tendency or a temptation towards the elaboration of a "system" or "model" of reading in the elaboration of the five codes by which Barthes classifies the "lexemes" of Balzac's text. The fact, however, that in another "textual analysis" by Barthes (1988), this time of Poe's tale "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar", the codes are different, suggests that, with Schefer, Barthes postulates that each object generates its own reading(s), its own structure, that the dream of a universalizable Model, the dream of (a) Theory, is defunct. Very much in the same direction as Barthes' work of the 1970s, then, Schefer's writing occupies the space between theory and writing, or perhaps more precisely between the theories mobilized and assumed by a visual object and the practice of writing, which will itself bring into play elements which trouble or fall outside that same theory. Each object produces but at the same time subverts its own theory.

3. Barthes had examined Schefer's diploma at the *Ecole des hautes études*. See the biographical-bibliographical statement on the POL website: <http://www.pol-editeur.com/index.php?spec=auteur&numauteur=286>.

The *Informe* in *Cahiers du cinéma*

Schefer's critique of orthodox iconology (Panofsky) and of structuralist semiology, advanced in *Scénographie* and in a near contemporary essay in the journal *Communications*, "*L'Image: le sens investie*", aligns his work with the critique of representation and of mimetic theories of literature being promoted around this time in *Tel Quel* (see French 1996). In the late 1960s *Tel Quel* was the dominant pole of reference for theories of textuality which drew on Marx and Freud in order to displace and transgress systems of meaning grounded in a centred intentional Subject, or Logos. For some time, between 1967 and 1972, the work of Derrida was also closely supported in the journal, and Derrida's critique of the metaphysics of presence in philosophy, a critique advanced in a practice of writing, was part of the journal's strategy, alongside Kristeva's elaboration of a different semiology, a semiotics "under" the sign. While in the early 1970s *Tel Quel* would move towards political alignments which were explicitly Maoist and which drew its focus elsewhere, its positions and tendencies would become a kind of hardline theoretical authority for journals in other fields, and especially for the film journals *Cinéthique* and *Cahiers du cinéma*. The latter, which moved increasingly towards Marxist positions in the late 1960s, would publish a series of issues around the turn of the decade in which successive translations of the writings of Eisenstein were accompanied by critical essays on the filmic and photographic image in which a "materialist" analysis of visual forms was elaborated. The principal direction was towards a critique of the ideology of the visual structured by the *camera obscura*, that is, situating a privileged Cartesian subject as the apparent centre and master of a structured visual field, and towards a strategic emphasis on heterogeneous elements which displaced or disrupted this system.

Schefer's work is part of this movement, but brings with it the instance of the *informe*, mentioned earlier. It is in the context of this tendency that we might view the inclusion of his essay "Split Colours/Blur" (*Les Couleurs renversées/la buée*) in *Cahiers du cinéma*.⁴ Schefer's essay is

4. Schefer's essay appeared alongside the second part of an essay by Jean-Pierre Oudart, a regular *Cahiers* contributor, titled "Towards a Critique of Representational Systems", and as a second "installment" of his own text in *Tel Quel*, "Note on Representational Systems", in Spring 1970, cementing the broad front across the two reviews. Pascal Bonitzer had also, for the journal's 1971 issues, contributed a two-part essay, "The Reality of Denotation" on the excessive and disruptive force of the close-up. The second part of this essay bore the title "The Big Toe" (*Le Gros orteil*), which reprised the title of an essay by Bataille from *Documents*. Through this reference Bonitzer sought to introduce into his thinking of the image some of the subversive force of the *informe*

aligned with the Bataillean emphasis on the excessive and the heterogeneous, the grit in the system, elaborated in and around *Tel Quel* in this period. Looking initially at Da Vinci, Schefer locates colour as repressed by the system of figuration, in which it appears “merely” as an attribute. If it is present it is as a “waste product” or an “excrement”; colour tends to disturb the system of perspective, and as a result it tends to be absorbed into the system, producing a kind of gradation or effects of alternation and distinction (Paul Smith, in Schefer, 1997a, p. 3). Against this Schefer highlights, with characteristic emphasis on the affective and material elements of the dynamic, an indistinction of colours, the “malignant blur” or “fog” that “threatens form and erases colours”:

Compared with all the properties of bodies (that is, compared to bodies themselves) distance generally means loss of quality, the very loss of the object. The far end of the scale, the moment of diminution and discolouration (when even the passion for line can no longer see anything “at a great distance” except the very unreason of its madness in the malignant blur that nature breathes – in the picture’s background – as the resistance of the subject being constructed there) is the point at which nature is produced in all her fiction, the fog that threatens form and erases colours with the whole weight of the painting itself yet to come: colour, with which Chinese painters before starting to paint used to fill their mouths and then spit out, is entirely inside this very fog—the fog into which Leonardo sees line, contour, volume, colour, objects, the world itself disappear—with his own analogical passion last of all—the spittle that washes away all the mouth’s evil spirits, voice, utterance, breath, the storm of reason, and in this case it all goes on to the paper. (Schefer, 1997a, p. 20)

Echoing Bataille’s analogy of the formless universe as a spider or spit, Schefer points here to the corporeal abjection that arrives on the paper as a blur or a fog; colour not as a system but as a wash-out, a zone of indistinction. This site where colour washes out or mixes into a kind of mud is akin to a Bataillean expenditure, a site of the loss of meaning, of formlessness. In other essays in *Cahiers*, by Bonitzer and Oudart, this expenditure and this formlessness can be found, they argue, in the extremities of the close-up, or in the blurred motion of the photogram

which Bataille had elaborated in the same journal; as a strategy within a work or within critical writing the *informe* leads meaning towards a kind of destructive dissipation, an excess of the system of meaning which erases or dissolves meaning itself (as more recently affirmed by Rosalind Krauss; see in particular Krauss and Bois, 1997).

(as distinct from the still). Implicitly drawing on the Bataillean notion of the *informe*, and as part of a generalized strategic emphasis on the heterogenous and excessive elements which disrupt systematicity, Schefer's conception of the image is already, at this early point, tending towards the excentricity and ordinariness (bearing in mind Conley's deflection of the word) which it will later embody.

Disproportionate Bodies

Schefer's initial turn towards film, after this early essay in *Cahiers*, comes with a series of texts clustered around the late 1970s and early 1980s. In the retrospective essay I referred to earlier, Brenez points to the importance of a series of *hors série* publications of *Cahiers* in the late 1970s. Schefer was an important contributor to these publications, now mostly inaccessible. His usually short texts are significant for a number of reasons – in part because they take the form of commentaries on still images rather than sequences, establishing a continuity with his writing on painting and on photography which also invariably read as meditations on the affective responses provoked by the image, and as noted earlier, on the relation of the image in and to the writing. But also because they introduce a major topic of interest for Schefer in early or “burlesque” cinema, and particularly the slapstick comedies of Chaplin, Keaton, Langdon and Laurel and Hardy, a topic of major focus in *The Ordinary Man of Cinema*. The bodies of early cinema, Schefer argues, are disproportionate, out of joint, and “obscene”, insofar as they deviate from and disrupt the centred perception of the idealised spectator, shattering that certainty. Before the full establishment of the star-system, with its ideal and idealised bodies, and subverting the grand narratives of films such as Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915), the burlesque cinema, Schefer suggests, introduced bodies which existed entirely in an aberrant gesturality and in a travestied physiognomy, and which proposed perverse redistributions of sexual identities and roles. The predominant stress is on the improbability of the movement (of a man falling as if fatally from a building on a drainpipe) or the alterity or “monstrosity” of the body and particularly of the faces of Langdon or Keaton, a physiognomy described as “inassimilable” or “inimitable” or “obscene” (Schefer 1999, p. 36, p. 31). It is often the whited-out plasticity of the face and body of Langdon or Keaton which Schefer highlights, beyond any reference to psychology or realism. The bodies of this early cinema introduce us to an “other world” which does not follow the physical laws of our own, which is constantly “unhinged” (*détraquée*) and in a state of “disproportion”, a “detachment of (and from) the world” (1999, p. 39). Thus Schefer's writing on the cinema is inaugurated by a radical separation from any sense of realism or

representation, by a focus on the other world of affects which the cinema raises in us as its spectators.⁵

The Spectator is the Machine

These short texts inform and prepare for a series of three pieces which Schefer will publish in 1979/80 which give fuller voice to his thinking of cinema: an interview in *Cahiers* with Daney and Oudart, *The Ordinary Man of Cinema* itself, and a “companion” piece in the film review *Ça Cinéma*, “*Dialogues imaginaires*”, taking in part the form of a dialogue with Raoul Ruiz. The 1979 interview with Daney and Oudart gives explicit expression to Schefer’s critique of previous theoretical approaches in and around *Cahiers*, in particular the realism of Bazin and the apparatus theory of *Tel Quel* novelist and critic, Jean-Louis Baudry. In reply to Daney and Oudart’s first question on the spectator’s certainty about the relation of the filmic image to the real, Schefer provocatively displaces the terrain in responding that he has no certainty, himself, about “who” the spectator is. The question is implicitly informed by the Bazinian thesis – that cinema is the “writing of Nature” due to the ontology of the photographic image, and the thesis, in the texts of Baudry and Christian Metz, of the “reality effect” of the cinematographic situation.⁶ Schefer questions the assumptions behind the question, in particular the postulation of an “ideal” spectator and the hypothesis of a “reflective” relation between the

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5. In one of the *hors série* issues of *Cahiers* from 1980, titled *Monstresses* Schefer, alongside Daney, Bonitzer and Raoul Ruiz among others, comments a series of images of “monstrous” female figures. A fragment on Oshima focuses on a striking image in which a girl is violated by her fellow geishas with a wooden object in the shape of a bird. Schefer’s title, “It’s Polyxena...” (*C’est Polyxène*) emphasizes the connection he makes between this scene of violation and the sacrifice of Polyxena (Iphigenia) in Greek mythology. The essay is reprised by Schefer in the 2002 volume *Polyxena and the Virgin in the Red Dress* (*Polyxène et le vierge à la robe rouge*), where it sits alongside a series of other essays on a vase in the British Museum and a medieval Flemish painting, so as to underline the thematic which runs across these images of “the repeated fright which beats like a heart in desire” (Schefer 2002, back cover statement). What is at stake here is a sense of the affective distortion that the image can introduce into the world, as if bringing back to light a primal scene or trauma, a “crime before the crime”, an explicit postulation of *The Ordinary Man of Cinema*.
 6. Schefer may also have in mind the essays by Baudry and Metz in a key issue of the semiology review *Communications*. Titled “*Psychanalyse et cinéma*”, and convened by Raymond Bellour, Christian Metz and Thierry Kuntzel, it included essays by Baudry and Metz which specifically addressed the “reality effect” of cinema. See Baudry (1975) and Metz (1975) (Baudry, 1976 and Metz, 1976 for the translations).

image on screen and the reality outside the “apparatus” (*dispositif*) of the cinema:

But I don't know... I don't know at all who the spectator is. Can your question be asked if one no longer has the right to suppose that a spectator exists. Does the cinema as an apparatus work in relation to an ideal spectator who realizes its effects, who is the site of the calculation of these effect, who is the delayed destination of the recording of the real? Isn't the spectator the machine, in a sense? To this extent, if he goes to the cinema, doesn't he go there for something completely other than the consciousness of a reflection? Isn't that the question, bearing in mind the creation of a complex apparatus of which the spectator is a part? (Schefer, 1999, p. 15)

For Schefer, the spectator is not a transcendent factor existing independently of the effects of the image-machine, but a part of this machine itself, or perhaps more specifically, the spectator is the machine, insofar as s/he is the site of the production of the effects or affects of the moving image, and the condition of its continuity, insofar as this is actualized in and by the spectator. Schefer goes on to propose that the reflection on the “*dispositif*” that occupied the pages of *Cahiers* a decade or so previously (so at the turn of the decade) was based on a “technicist illusion”, itself provoked by an avant-gardist critique of the image's power of manipulation (1999, p. 15). Indeed, the orientation of *Cahiers* and of *Tel Quel* at the time was in part a critique of the power of ideological capture and subjection embodied, it was proposed, in the cinematic apparatus, insofar as this reproduced or “supposed” the spectator as the focal point of the *camera obscura* structure, thus inheriting the structure of the system of representation underpinned by rationalism. Rather than the “science of language” which was marshaled for this critique, Schefer proposes a “science of the species” (1999, p. 16), obscured by the linguistic bias of semiology. What semiological film analysis fails to capture, Schefer proposes, is the “terror” and the “shock” of the experience of the cinema, an effect or an affect for which he proposes the term “sideration”. To this extent the vocabulary and presuppositions of a psychoanalysis focused on the subject is, for Schefer, misplaced. This is to move too far and too quickly, one might say, in assuming that the spectator is a stable or already constituted self, and that s/he receives the image in this guise. Psychoanalysis, for Schefer, reduces or annuls the distance or difference of what he calls “experimental man” (1999, p. 16). This last expression keys into a major impetus in Schefer's thought, which works against a pathologising or normative approach to the differences set in motion by forms such as the cinema. Schefer points, as an example, to the way Freud's whole approach to President Schreber's schizophrenia

tends to absorb his differences and the production of a different body (which is “exterior” or “symptomatic” [1999, p. 16]). This contrasts with Schefer’s quasi-Deleuzian assertion that the aim is to understand the new, experimental processes in their own right: “We need to grasp the extreme possibilities of these new processes further” (1999, p. 16). Schefer thus tends to substitute, for the term “subject”, the word “being” (*être*), or, as before, “species” (*espèce*), and thus in a sense to move back before the constitution of the “subject” to a less defined sense of “who” or “what” the spectator might be.

Anamorphic Sideration

While this might seem to approximate to a mode, albeit unorthodox, of the phenomenological *epoché*, Schefer’s proposition departs from this insofar as the perceptive body no longer provides a model for the spectator in and of the cinema. Schefer responds, still to the same question, that: “perhaps it is also a question of thinking that a new organism is being constituted which is not completely reducible to a perceptual body” (1999, p. 17). He thus postulates that the spectator, solicited and situated by the cinema, is an experimental and unprecedented being, even a new form of humanity. The question is thus not of the “reality effect” that the cinema induces, with degrees of correspondence to the reality recognised by a subject, but the disruptive and disorienting effects which he names “sideration”:

I wonder if the answer one might start to develop around these questions doesn’t consist in seeing the phenomenon of cinema not as a technical phenomenon linked to its devices, to its apparatuses, but in considering its general effect of *sideration*, and the very specific fact that it is the first machine in the world, far more than Greek tragedy, which impregnates humanity with scenarios, in an indelible and mobile manner. (Schefer, 1999, p. 17–18)

This sideration, a sudden paralysis induced by something outside the world, by the stars, is also an anamorphosis. Indeed the notion of sideration comprises the idea of being “star-struck”, as if from the side or from behind, by something from outside the circumference of one’s visual agency in the world. Schefer introduces the concept of anamorphosis in order to account for the way in which films can have a distorting effect on reality outside the cinema, for example the way in which children play at cowboys after having seen a Western (1999, p. 18). But it has a wider currency in his writing on film and on painting, and is a useful notion to grasp his approach to visual forms, and the relation between these forms and writing.

Although Schefer makes no direct reference to Lacan's use of the concept in his seminar of 1964, in the account of the "split between the eye and the gaze" (Lacan, 1986, pp. 85–90) and his commentary on Holbein's anamorphic painting *The Ambassadors*, the theorization of the visual encounter is parallel. In his writing on painting and on film Schefer writes of the way in which the spectator, drawn to the orthodox, classical, or "sublime" image of the painting, is also solicited, in a different part of themselves, by peripheral elements which are less defined, where the image begins to lose focus and slide towards a formless dissipation. This is salient in Schefer's writing on Uccello's *The Deluge* (1445–7), but also in a text Schefer wrote in 1979 for an unrealized film to be directed by contemporary director Philippe Grandrieux, commissioned by the workshop of video artist and critic Thierry Kuntzel. The piece was published as "Light and its Prey" (1997a) and takes the form of an extended response to Correggio's painting *The Mystical Union* (or, *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine*, ca. 1525). Schefer writes of the way in which the "sublime" instance of the central group (Saint Catherine, the Infant Jesus, the Virgin and Saint Sebastian) is undermined by "an internal periphery of objects floating around it" (1997a, p. 71). The sublime is considered to obscure the less formal solicitation of the viewer by what Schefer calls the "obscenity" of the picture, by "indistinct, enigmatic and misshapen edges", by "unfinished or indistinct bodies", and by "a whole species of the visible which [...] would replace the world with monsters" (1997a, p. 71). The form of the portrait thus competes, anamorphically, with the "certain mud of all light", as if form were necessarily in a fraught dynamic with its formless other. But if the frontal effect of the picture is to focus our look and our intention on the central group, Schefer writes that: "The effect of the picture is to produce something that our gaze or normally active sight could never give birth to within us" (1997a, p. 72). The picture is a "paradoxical mirror", which confronts us, siderally, with an enigma: "because at the centre of ourselves, by way of a spot that cannot be demonstrated, this world is not of the world" (1997a, p. 73).

This anamorphic dynamic informs Schefer's writing on film. It is not only that cinema provokes its spectators to see reality aslant, but that the cinema appeals to an unlived, unborn part of us, the memory of an unlived time. In *The Ordinary Man of Cinema* Schefer writes of the films that "photographed us" in our childhood, an echo, perhaps, of Lacan's proposition, in Seminar 11 (1986), that it is through the gaze, mediated by the screen, that "I am photo-graphed" (p. 106; see also Silverman 1996, chapters 4–6). In an early contribution to *Trafic*, "On the Tracking Shot in *Kapo*", Serge Daney (2007) highlights this expression from Schefer,

remembering it as “the films that have watched our childhood” and then revising it as “the films that have watched us” (pp. 20–21). The reversal of the subject and object here indicates something of the anamorphosis that operates in Schefer’s writing on the visual as a whole: “something” enigmatic in us is solicited, siderally, by what we see. Schefer writes from that place, or rather, Schefer’s writing is produced from that enigmatic place, in him, outside the agency of his look and the frame and object of representation.

Cinema as Abattoir

Generated from this anamorphic sideration, the textual, poetic provocation of Schefer’s writing, and the Bataillean tenor we remarked upon earlier, is very evident in Schefer’s statement, in the Daney/Oudart interview, that: “ultimately, a cinema is an abattoir. People go to the abattoir” (Schefer, 1999, p. 19). Resonant with Bataille’s fascination with the slaughterhouse as a contemporary avatar of ritual sacrifice, Schefer posits the cinema as a site of destruction and loss. In the cinema, the construction of reality by a subject falls away and is annihilated, for the time of the film. The perceptual body of the subject, the subject as imaginative centre and agent of its actions and movements in the world, gives way or is given up to the on-screen image, which is also threatened by formlessness. In this vein Schefer postulates that a new humanity has come to being with the cinema; the cinema solicits a new, “impossible” being which is in a relation of absolute alterity to the social being who inhabits the world outside: “All of this suggests the idea that a new humanity, not so much ‘ideal’ as impossible, strictly speaking, is in the course of being born, or exists in an absolute yet everyday outside, as a spectre for each social living being” (1999, p. 19). Schefer thus attends to the difference between the world of the cinema, the world conjured for the spectator, and external reality, as well as kind of economy between one and the other, an economy and a relation not of reflection or of illusion, but of radical incommensurability; the cinema annuls, intermittently and for the time of its projection, the world of “the living social being” (*le vivant social*). It is as if, but also in a very real sense, the being that comes to life in the cinema, as part of its mechanism, takes the place of the social being, but takes its place not without a catastrophic loss of capacity; the spectator is thus “aphasic” (1999, p. 21). Moreover, the actions and movements of the bodies on screen simulate my own movements, while also soliciting in me my “inclinations” (*velléités*), substitute for them, and submit them to a fatality, a prescribed “scenario”: “I am simulated, which is to say that another body and a whole scenario (a scenario which is fatal in its unfolding and in its prescriptive power) are displaced into

me as an inclination towards pleasure and action” (1999, p. 21). The cinema is a form of “induction” into the beginnings of movements; it provokes “inclinations” towards them. Schefer hypothesizes a form of proprioceptive identification on the part of the spectator with the on-screen bodies but also with any element or object of this world; simulated movements solicit a movement in the immobile spectator, but which does not go far enough to constitute a double or a contiguous world. The world in which the cinema exists thus brings into being what Schefer calls “inceptive” man (*l’homme inchoatif*), a being in whom only the beginnings of actions or the inclination towards actions are solicited:

Something needs to be thought about this machine beyond the effects of sideration and simulation themselves (an apparent simulation of the world), around the effect of induction into the beginnings of conducts – these beginning conducts are specific not so much in being fragmented but especially in being protected, safeguarded by the delegation of their irreparable birth; from being at the same time sheltered from the world and yet not being able to constitute a second world, nor a continuously doubled being; so what is experienced first of all in inceptive man is a contiguity of unsynthesisable worlds, that don’t add together. (Schefer, 1999, pp. 21–22)

In this light, the Brechtian or Godardian “exorcism” of the alienating effects of the film cannot, Schefer proposes, constrain or deter the effect of “invasion” of the spectator’s immobile body by the movements of the bodies and objects on screen: “What happens when one lets oneself be invaded by a filmed body whose descent or displacement one can’t stop?” (p. 22). Rather than effects of meaning or of alienation, Schefer is concerned with the affective changes brought about by the specific conditions of the cinema, and by the specific character of the bodies that it makes move. These bodies, which “take our place” in the sense that their movements depend on our vision and on our immobility as spectators in the cinema, propose a “mutation” of the human: “The elements of this machine are not mechanical devices or functions (perceptive, mnemonic or cognitive functions); one of its elements is perhaps a sort of mutant subject or a more unknown being – we should speak in terms of a paradoxical spectator” (p. 29). The “mutants” which feature in *The Ordinary Man of Cinema*, such as Frankenstein’s creature, or the Mummy, or the figures in Todd Browning’s *Freaks* (1932), alongside the fatally accident-prone and unbalanced, sexually ambivalent bodies of slapstick comedies, are emblematic of the distortion and

displacement of the normative body which Schefer sees at work in the cinema.⁷

The question of the “reality effect” of the cinema, in Schefer’s estimation, needs then to be approached from an entirely different angle from that proposed in Bazinian theory, but also by the apparatus theory of Baudry et al, that is, otherwise than as related to the question of the referent. The real proposed by the cinema is, rather, to be located in the lived experience of the spectator in and of the cinema, and in relation to the question of time. Schefer proposes that: “in the cinema the subject spectator has the experience not of the disappropriation of his reality but of a disappropriation of his surplus reality, which is time. He is subjected to a new experience of time, an experience entirely foreign to him, of which images are infused, due to the delegation of their continuity to him, to his experimental affective life as a spectator” (1999, p. 54). What the cinema introduces, as a radically new experience, is a substitution of the affective, lived experience of the spectator by the other bodies and objects on screen, whose movement is “reported”, or dependent on the spectator’s vision. The spectator’s projected actions and desires, “inceptions” of movements, are taken over, as it were, by the prescribed movements of the film. The real of the cinema is thus not what is “reflected” but what is produced “in” the spectator by way of affect:

The cinema produces reality not at the level of the referents of the image but at the level of the existential lived experience of the spectator (*le vécu existentiel du spectateur*). The spectator’s affects, which I call experimental, which are not bound, which have no determination, no precise structure like a fear, an anxiety, a joy (these are the names one gives to them, but these affects are in a way *informe*, even more so in that they have no object, not constant support) – the affects that the cinema produces are the reality. The point of constitution of reality in the cinema is the spectator: his existential, momentary experience, more or less bound to the duration of the film and, in any case, absolutely bound to the spectator’s memory, to the structure of his memory. A repository is constituted in memory and in it reside images, sounds, movements, degrees of definition of images: a part of memory is enframed, caught in frames. For me, this is the cinema’s reality, not the reality of reference. In the relation the spectator entertains with the cinema, if he recognises something of himself, it’s only an image, I would not say of his already accomplished or possible actions, but an image of his

7. The term “mutant” also proposes a continuity across Schefer’s work, between these texts of the 1970s and his essay “On the Lives of Mutants” (“De la vie des mutants”) for the inaugural issue of the cinema journal *Trafic* in 1991, to which Schefer has been a regular contributor. See also Vaughan 2012.

interior life, that is of his inclinations to act, of his utopic, probable acts, a stock of virtual permutations in the scenario of his life which will in some way remain unrealised. The reality of the cinematograph is truly that. It's a pre-emption of the present, the future and the past by something which is nevertheless more than the spectator's imaginary, something that catches him where he is not complete, in his psychic structure which is not complete: he is porous to something fundamentally linked to time, which is to say anxiety (Schefer, 1999, p. 56).

There are a number of key propositions in this programmatic statement: the real is produced, not reflected, and it is produced in the spectator as a "stock" of affects. These affects are nevertheless not precise, but formless; they lack definition. The cinema thus produces and solicits a memory, not of past or possible actions but of virtual actions and possibilities which remain unaccomplished. The cinema is "pre-emptive", but the notion of the imaginary is insufficient to account for this; the cinema "completes" the spectator, engaging or capturing her at that point of incompleteness or anxiety with regard to time.

The Enigma of an Origin

The ideas discussed above are articulated more fully in 1980 with *The Ordinary Man of Cinema*. The significant addition is a new methodology of writing on and thinking about film, as encapsulated by the title. The "ordinary man of cinema", Schefer proposes, goes there for "distraction" (thus not, as Bazin would posit, to experience a reflection of the real, and not, as Baudry and others would propose, as a universal subject prone to effects of illusion and alienation), but through this very distraction may also experience a new, "invented" time, a distortion of the body, and the "improbability" of this world (Schefer, 2016, p. 9). The "surprise" of the experience – thus the newness of the experience – derives from the discovery, on the part of the spectator, of the "capacity to live in many worlds at once".⁸ This "Proustian" insight – which plays itself out in Schefer's later commentaries on Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962) and Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) – two films in close proximity to one another – points us towards a conception of the cinema as a form of

8. This expression resonates, for me, with the scenario of Chris Marker's 1962 film (or "photo-roman") *La Jetée*, and, through that relation, with Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, to which it refers and of which Marker has proposed that *La Jetée* is a "remake". Schefer has written on both of these (1999), attentive to the way in which both films propose a "doubling" of the operation of film as such, a kind of parable for the entrapment of the spectator in the world of the image.

temporality within us which is out of joint, so to speak, with that of our lived lives and time.

In this vein, Schefer proposes that writing on cinema is determined by what he calls “the mystery of an origin” (2016, p. 10). Schefer writes, he says, and his writing is authorized only by this, in order to elucidate the enigmatic world which “opens within us” in the cinema, of which we are the “genesis” (2016, p. 10). However the origin and the genesis at stake do not relate solely to our capacity to make sense of the images, to our “recognition” of them, but also to the paradoxical “birth”, the beginning of a virtual, un-lived world, to which elsewhere Schefer gives the expression “the memory of un-lived time” (1999, p. 87). To write on cinema is thus not to “theorise” it, but to give voice to this experience and to this memory: “to give voice to that memory” (2016, p. 10). This suggests at the same time that, like Stanley Cavell, Schefer writes “from memory”, that he writes of the memory of films seen or of details in films, rather than on the basis of an analytic decomposition of the film (as in the work of Bellour or Kuntzel for example), and that he draws on his own memory of films (for example of the first film he watched, *Shoeshine* (*Sciuscia*, Vittorio de Sica, 1946)). But it also suggests a theorization of a relation between the cinema and what Schefer calls “a memory of disproportions that corresponds to very powerful moments in the birth and development of subjectivity” (1999, p. 104). Schefer writes, in the “*Dialogues imaginaires*” essay, that what the cinema appeals to is a “receptive humus”, what it afford access to is “the nascent world of images”, that is, to a responsiveness prior to the recognition or figurative aspects of the image (1999, p. 104; see also 2016, p. 11). Schefer thus develops an account of cinema which sees the affect and sensation of the image as prior to, and in excess of the capacity to recognise or “read” an object: “affects exceed the figurative frame of objects” (1999, p. 85). The cinema thus affords and creates an “anteriority of affects (that is of unstructured feelings) over the readability of images” (1999, p. 85). Although Schefer does not invoke it explicitly, the Bataillean notion of the *informe* is linked here to a developmental and psychoanalytically-inflected account which posits sensation and affect as prior to signification and recognition, to the conceptual and linguistic classification of things. This other world solicited in us by the cinema is also, Schefer proposes, with a Proustian inflection, a world which responds to and gives momentary visual form to the “invisible” and unactualised element of our bodies, that is to say, of our lives. It solicits “our un-lived potential”, “the invisible part of our bodies”, that part of us which has remained without action: “It addresses itself only to this body which is within us as a body without action” (1999, p. 86).

Schefer thus posits, in the cinema, a form of exchange or “pact” between the immobile, and silent, spectator, and the moving and audible bodies (objects as well as “characters”) on screen. The spectator is not an “instance of interpretation” of the cinematographic image, but as if already, from the beginning, a part of its world: “looking at this film, at such and such a detail, an angle, or a shot, I am not an instance of interpretation; thus I cannot, as I can in front of an already framed painting, assure myself of the visible as if through another consciousness of the mastery of the proportions of my body” (1999, p. 83). Without fully explicating this effect of “inclusion” or “subjection” Schefer seems to distinguish between the moving image of the cinema and the framed and static worlds of painting and photography. The “procession” (*défilement*) of the moving image, which in *Camera Lucida* (1993) Barthes decried as “voracious” (p. 55), disallowing an ability to engage or to locate the “punctum” of the image, is in Schefer’s account what allows or rather necessitates a kind of helplessness in relation to this world, a sense of fear or error over the corresponding loss of our social being, but it is also that which affords the cinema the capacity to provoke or produce “effects of memory” (2016, p. 11). This is, again paradoxically, a memory of an unexpressed, unlived element in us: “that part given over to silence and to a relative aphasia as if it were the ultimate secret of our lives” (2016, p. 12), to a fundamental part of us which remains “lacking in expression” (*en souffrance d’expression*) (2016, p. 13; translation adapted). Schefer also refers to this as “the relation of an object of thought to what, in the very act of thinking, absents itself from thought” (*se refuse à la pensée*) (p. 15). It is that part of us that has been as if sacrificed for the life of action, language and representation which occupies our social being. Cinema appeals to and “speaks to” the unlived part of us, that part which remains inexpressed or inexpressible, “aphasic” in relation to language. It gives us a memory of unlived time. It “raises” or causes to be born in us a “ghostly existence” (*existence fantomal*) (p. 112).

Aberrant Movement

The movements proposed in film are also “aberrant movements”. Cinema presents the spectator with simulations of movements, yet these simulations are of movements without a centre of gravity, whose proportions are mobile and uncertain; these are “experimental” bodies, that is, bodies no longer guaranteed by the physical laws to which I am subjected as an agent in the social world. So, as a spectator, as a being solicited by this world I am solicited as a disproportionate body, a body without a centre of gravity. Schefer’s writing allows one to imagine a sort of exchange whereby the screen image of a disproportionate and aberrant,

yet immaterial body is translated, in a sense, into the substance and duration of my body as a spectator. Thus, what is raised or born in me is a being for whom the physical laws of the world have been in some sense suspended. And this aberration of movement is introduced through the subjection of movement as such to the anteriority of time; temporality intervenes prior to the sphere of action, causality, and this primal subjection to time can unfix movement from its tracks.

This is one of the major theses of Gilles Deleuze's distinction between the movement-image and the time-image. The argument is articulated by Deleuze in a number of ways, including the quasi-historical logic which identifies a post-war crisis in the sensory-motor schema by which pre-war cinema is dominated, and the emergence of "intolerable" situations at which protagonists can only look, transformed from actors into seers. Schefer's *The Ordinary Man of Cinema*, which Deleuze describes as a "great poem" of theory, plays a key role in the logical articulation of Deleuze's thought. Deleuze sees in Schefer's volume an expression of the most "rigorous consequences" of the recognition of aberrant movement:

More recently, Jean-Louis Schefer, in a book in which the theory forms a kind of great poem, showed that the ordinary cinema-viewer, the man without qualities, found his correlate in the movement image as extraordinary movement. The movement-image does not reproduce a world, but constitutes an autonomous world, made up of breaks and disproportion, deprived of all its centres, addressing itself as such to a viewer who is in himself no longer centre of his own perception. The *perciens* and the *perci* have lost their points of gravity. Schefer draws the most rigorous consequences from this: the aberration of movement specific to the cinematographic image sets time free from any linkage; it carries out a direct presentation of time by reversing the relationship of subordination that time maintains with normal movement; "cinema is the sole experience where time is given to me as a perception". Certainly Schefer points to a primordial crime with an essential link to this condition of cinema, just as Pasolini invoked a primordial death for the other situation. It is a homage to psychoanalysis, which has only ever given cinema one sole object, one single refrain, the so called primitive scene. But there is no other crime than time itself. (Deleuze, 1989a, p. 37)

Schefer's thesis of the "disproportion" and loss of centres of gravity in image and spectator alike, which he draws in part from an entry in Kafka's diary from 1920 (see Schefer 2016, p. 104), allows Deleuze to draw out of *The Ordinary Man of Cinema* the proposition of cinema as giving a direct image of time, of the priority or anteriority of time as such. What Deleuze appears to object to in Schefer's thought is the postulation of

an “original crime”, in which he sees a “homage to psychoanalysis”. I have, it is true, identified in Schefer’s film writing the postulation of a developmental account which links the experience of cinema to a “pre-corporeal” pre-linguistic part of the subject. In the strongest sense, the argument would propose that Schefer makes the time invented in the cinema dependent on a developmental “phase” in the subject, the infant, which corresponds to a pre-oedipal moment before, one might postulate, the mirror stage and the “entry” into the world of symbolic representations; this would conflict with a Deleuzian thesis of the account of the time-image as a plane of immanence independent of the psychoanalytic notion of the primal scene and especially of Œdipal structure.

Yet Schefer’s reference to psychoanalysis is more implicit than explicit. In the interview with Daney and Oudart, in response to the proposition on their part that the burlesque cinema is “oral-anal” in psychoanalytic terms, Schefer counters that this is a cinema of bodies “without anatomy” or “beyond anatomy” (Schefer, 1999, p. 26). I see Deleuze’s relation to Schefer’s notion of “original crime” as an inflection rather than a disagreement.⁹ Deleuze intensifies in Schefer’s thought those elements that exceed and dissipate a strictly developmental or strictly psychic narrative, moving beyond the notion of a primal scene, which Deleuze says is the only contribution psychoanalysis has to make to cinema. In this light, when Schefer writes of birth or of genesis, we need to think of a shift of subject; this is not the birth or genesis or anteriority of man or of subjectivity but of thought. It is on the terrain of thought, and in the chapter of *The Time-Image* devoted to “Thought and Cinema”, that Schefer makes his greatest impact in Deleuze’s thought.

Thought in the Pure State

Having, in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, considered Eisenstein’s project to “give a shock to thought” through the image and through montage in particular, Deleuze takes a different route through Artaud, and then via Blanchot, in seeking to think through the way in which the former was confronted by an incapacity of thought at the heart of thought. If Artaud suffered from this, but also drew from this suffering the power of his own

9. It is interesting to see the way in which, in his Vincennes lectures, cited earlier, Deleuze is wary of certain ostensibly psychoanalytic moves on Schefer’s part, but also identifies in Schefer’s text a movement outside that context. Deleuze says: “You see that there as well he has flirted with the psychoanalytic theme, the cinema and childhood, all of that. Only this is a child who has no age, he says, it’s a monstrous child, a child in the sense of something within us, behind us” (1985).

writing, the reference to Blanchot allows Deleuze to engage with the idea of a greater power of thought gained through the confrontation with the impossibility of thought:

[...] the essence of cinema [...] has thought as its higher purpose, nothing but thought and its functioning. In this regard, the strength of Jean-Louis Schefer's book is in having replied to the question: in what respect and how is cinema concerned with a thought whose essential character is not yet to be? He says that the cinematographic image, as soon as it takes on its aberration of movement, carries out a *suspension of the world* or affects the visible with a *disturbance*, which, far from making thought visible, as Eisenstein wanted, are on the contrary directed to what does not let itself be thought in thought, and equally to what does not let itself be seen in vision. This is perhaps not "crime" as he believes, but simply the power of the false. He says that thought, in cinema, is brought face to face with its own impossibility, and yet draws from this a higher power of birth. He adds that the condition of cinema has only one equivalent, not imaginary participation but the rain when you leave the auditorium; not dream, but the blackness and insomnia. Schefer is close to Artaud. His conception of cinema now finds a complete match in the work of Garrel: the dancing grains which are not made to be seen, the luminous dust which is not a prefiguration of bodies, the flakes of snow and blankets of soot. [...] As well as the great scene with the mill and the white flour piling up, at the end of Dreyer's *Vampyr*, Schefer proposes the example of the beginning of Kurosawa's *Cobweb Castle* (Macbeth): the grey, the steam and a mist constitute "a whole this side of the image", which is not a blurred veil put in front of things, but "a thought, without body and without image". [...] According to Schefer, it is the suspension of the world, rather than movement, which gives the visible to thought, not as its object, but as an act which is constantly arising and being revealed in thought: "not that it is here a matter of thought become visible, the visible is affected and irremediably affected by the initial incoherence of thought, this inchoate quality". This is the description of the *ordinary man in cinema*: the spiritual automaton, "mechanical man", "experimental dummy", Cartesian diver in us, unknown body which we have at the back of our heads whose age is neither ours nor that of our childhood, but a little time in the pure state (Deleuze, 1989b, pp. 168–69).

With this last expression, "a bit of time in the pure state", an unacknowledged quotation from Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* (see Proust 2003, p. 180), Deleuze connects the *informe* dissipation, before, or on "this side of the image", something not yet formed as an image, with the spiritual automaton – the thought without a subject that cinema is – and the "original", unlived time of which the cinema affords

us a “direct perception”. Schefer’s commentary on the final sequence of Dreyer’s *Vampyr* (1932), or more exactly his writing of this sequence, the writing produced in or through him by this sequence, reads it as a kind of allegory of the cinema – the machinery of the mill producing the flour which covers and “whites out” the figure in the cage: “the gears and pulleys work like an apparatus of time to produce the disappearance of a body into dust” (Schefer, 2016, p. 171). Deleuze sees this as a correlate of a sort to the suspension of the lived, phenomenal world, and the corresponding birth of an unthought thought, an unlived time. In this way, the drift of form towards the *informe*, or the memory of an incoherence of form before the form of the image, which finds its visibility in amorphous substances such as dust, grains, snow, ash, flour, mud, is also the condition of the birth of something else, another species.

The idea that “we are not yet thinking” engages what Deleuze calls the “spiritual automaton” – automaton because this is thought “itself thinking itself” (Deleuze, 1989b, p. 158). The shift from Artaud to Blanchot, and then to Schefer, in Deleuze’s text takes place via a reference to the figure of the Mummy, in part through Deleuze’s reference (p. 310) to the work of Véronique Taquin on Dreyer, whose films feature significantly in Schefer’s *The Ordinary Man of Cinema*. At this juncture Deleuze writes: “The spiritual automaton has become the Mummy, this dismantled, paralysed, petrified, frozen instance which testifies to ‘the impossibility of thinking that is thought’” (1989b, p. 166). The continuity that Deleuze evinces across Artaud and Blanchot, and the instance of the Mummy, brings into play Schefer’s commentary on this figure, which Schefer as we saw earlier sees as being born with cinema, and with Schefer’s commentary on various instances of Dreyer’s films. I imagine that Deleuze is implicitly guided by these continuities. On the Mummy, as pictured in Terence Fisher’s film of 1959, Schefer writes:

Here arises a being that was never engendered in this world (nor in history); an organism endemic to cinema comes to infect us with its impossible birth. And as a spectator I am the perpetual site of this birth and of a duration that is never granted to monsters. [...] This mummy, giant puppet of rags and wrappings, covered in an armour of pus, bestows, even through blindfolded eyes, the gaze of putrefaction by which the world is condemned. He does not speak, he moans”. (Schefer, 2016, pp. 31–33)

The bound figure of the Mummy relates Deleuze’s Blanchotian idea of the impossibility of thinking that is thought to a cinema image, and finds in Schefer’s attention to such “monstrous” figures correlatives for the “thought” with which cinema presents us. As if the binding up of the body

and the subsequent suppression of anatomy, also there in the image of the “Sausage” (“*Le Boudin*”) in Todd Browning’s *Freaks* as commented by Schefer, were to move us as spectators towards the image or figure of thought without a thinker (p. 55). It is on this terrain that Schefer’s *The Ordinary Man of Cinema* is most fully resonant with Deleuze’s thought, and it generates on Deleuze’s part a profound if selective mining of Schefer’s text for the poetics of the spiritual automaton. The text of Deleuze’s lectures at the University of Vincennes in 1984–5 shows that Deleuze is attentive to the intrusive nature of the operation of extracting “theses” from Schefer’s book, and the destruction of its poetry that will result; he describes Schefer as a “sort of equilibrist” in the dynamic balance he achieves between the poetry of the writing and the rigour of the theses that it contains (Deleuze, 1985).

The poetic resonances that Deleuze finds in Schefer’s *The Ordinary Man of Cinema*, beyond the thesis of cinematic movement as aberrant and acentred, thus seem to me, in addition to the incoherence of the materially *informe* which for Deleuze connects Schefer to the work of Philippe Garrel, to cluster around the figure of the bound and somehow de-anatomized body in which Deleuze sees a correlative for the “unthought”, the thought that cinema thinks outside any psychological subject (on Deleuze and Garrel see French, 2011). They are figures of the Body without Organs, a previous conceptual “persona” in Deleuze and Guattari’s work which describes the dehumanized, unorganized potential of thought as such. If in *Anti-Œdipus* the Body without Organs, a figure drawn from the writings of Artaud, designates an immanent body prior to its “organization” (1983), in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (1999), it is reoriented as a “milieu of experimentation”, as suggested by the chapter title: “How do you make yourself a Body without Organs?” (p. 164). Schefer’s figures, and the poetry of his writing, resonate with the earlier Deleuze-Guattarian figure, with its distorted corporeality, but also with the stress of the experimental, for example when Schefer writes: “There is thus that thing [*cette chose*], moaning, laughing, and swimming, that does not reach childhood” (2016, p. 112). Schefer’s terms “*chose*”, and “*espèce*” generate a series of other substantives for the unnameable “being without qualities” which he proposes that the cinema causes to be (re)-born in us, and for which he finds correlates in the image of the Mummy, or the “sausage man” in *Freaks*: “a doll”, “a diver” (*ludion*), “a vampire”, “a creature”, “an animal or human without contours”, “a dwarf” (2016, pp. 112–13). For Schefer the body solicited by the cinema, the body born in us through the visualization of a world which is without centres of gravity, constantly risks transgressing proportionality, and which is also without duration or

substance, is out of joint even with the perceptual body of actions, the phenomenological body of Merleau-Ponty for which the imagination comes into play at multiple levels to project and thus to enable actions and movements in relation to objects in the world. The body of the spectator is not the perceptual body, but a pre-perceptual body of affects and “inclinations” as yet without name, for which Deleuze and Guattari (1983) had already offered the subtractive definition of the Body without Organs (pp. 20–27). Schefer writes that, in the cinema, “I lose [...] the imaginary sphere of movements whose centre I was assured to be, and which alone enabled me to act (to walk, to suffer) in the world” (2016, p. 116). Without such an assurance, the being of the spectator is “indifferenciated” and is “obstinately amputated of all organs” (2016, p. 111). Schefer’s image of the cinema as situating the spectator “between” a “giant body and the object of its gaze” (p. 94) but equally of the spectator being “doubled” by a “guardian angel” (p. 104) or as if “a child, seated within us, still held our hand” (p. 87) also resonates with Deleuze’s concept of the body without organs, a corporeal figure for the spiritual automaton.

The ordinary man of the cinema, in the cinema, is thus prey to the Body without Organs that the cinema raises, as if raising a body from the grave. This resurrection is also a birth, a conjuration of the spiritual automaton, of thought without a thinker. The cinema conjures a non-anatomical body of affects without a centre, an image of thought before thinking, as it were. But this is also a kind of dissipation, a variation of the *informe*, insofar as it draws the spectator into an aberrant movement which is itself a direct perception of time. Schefer’s major contribution to philosophical thinking about film (where “philosophical” does not imply a straightforward application of concepts or a reference back to systems) lies perhaps in this conflation of the Bataillean and the Deleuzian dimensions of the experience of cinema; the birth, within us, of an inchoate world which conjurs the memories of a life unlived.

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The Unlived Body in Schefer, Bataille and Deleuze

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